DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 170 SO 009 884

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TITLE Citizenship Needs: A Review.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation; Citizenship; *Citizenship Responsibility; *Civics; Conflict Resolution; *Curriculum Development; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Individual Development; Political Issues; Productive Thinking; *Relevance (Education); Self Actualization; Social Studies; Surveys

ABSTRACT

The status of citizenship education in American public elementary and secondary schools is discussed and suggestions are made for curriculum development. Although administrators rank citizenship education as a high priority, research shows it is given minimal attention in elementary grades and inadequate coverage in high school. Students must be prepared for reflective and effective political participation in society. One way of achieving citizenship participation, individual development, and an informed citizenry is to make citizenship content relevant to current issues in student life. Teachers and society in general are accused of overprotecting students from controversial issues, thereby inhibiting their self-actualization. In our highly mobile, spatially divided society, self-actualized students who are given an adequate orientation about citizens' rights and responsibilities could discharge their civic duties in a responsible manner. Results of three studies are summarized to point out the low awareness level of teenagers and young adults about government structure and individual rights. Suggestions for curriculum development stress an action-centered approach in programs which use learning environments outside the classroom, provide students with experiences in dealing with conflict, and have affective as well as cognitive objectives. (AV)

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CITIZENSHIP NEEDS: A REVIEW

by

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Citizenship education, a traditional goal of the schools, is highly ranked among the stated objectives of public school administrators. The goal of such education is to prepare students to become active participants in today's changing society. Among other things, citizenship education helps students to analyze issues, to use independent judgment, and to become involved in improving the democratic processes. This being true, classroom instruction should help foster the development of citizenship skills and attitudes. However, this may not necessarily be the case.

Introduction

Although educators claim to give prominence to citizenship education, there is some concern about the degree to which a concerted effort is put forth in developing citizenship skills (Browne, 1973; Taylor, 1974). Such concern gives rise to several questions. What actually constitutes citizenship training? Is sufficient interaction between students and teachers permitted and/or encouraged so as to promote citizenship training? Are important citizenship behaviors really being emphasized in the classroom? Is the classroom situation structured to provide maximal development of citizenship skills? Regarding citizenship training, Browne stated:

SO 009 884

> A good deal of lip-service is paid in the elementary grades. But it [citizenship training] has usually not been accorded a distinctive place in the curriculum at this level. And, perhaps as a result of its unclear position, few educators consider developing citizenship programs that can meet any preconceived behavioral objectives. In other words, this aspect of education continues to be rather hit and miss in its direction. (1973, p. 149)

Citizenship behaviors may be influenced by guidance in a citizenship program; that is, students may be aided in evaluating situations, using independent judgment, and critically analyzing issues. Shaver (1967) discussed the rationale for such a program in the schools. He asserted:

> This program should . . . be based on a rationale that takes into account the society's goals for all youth, not just those going on to college or those who come to school with an interest in abstract descriptions of the society and its past. A reasonable focus for such a rationale in a democratic society is the preparation of students for more reflective and effective political participation in their society—a society whose central commitment to human dignity assumes that all citizens have contributions to make to the determination of public

> policies, and that the schools should foster the ability to participate readily and rationally. (Shaver, 1967, p. 589)

Adult citizenship training in the post-World War II period encompassed three major categories: citizenship participation, individual development, and an aware and informed citizenry (Stubblefield, 1974). Citizenship participation included developing individuals to the point that they were able to engage effectively and productively in social groups whose activities included the concerns of the community. Individual development consisted of growth in skills of judgment guided by reason instead of emotions. An aware and informed citizenry, the third major category of adult citizenship training, stressed the need to understand the significance of societal events, trends, and conditions (Stubblefield, 1974).

Making the content relevant to current issues in student life is one requirement of assisting students in achieving the skills in the aforementioned areas of citizenship education. Content relevancy is directly related to the changing social conditions. Student adaptations to changing social conditions enable them to build a reportoire of behaviors for future societal changes. Students will learn to cope with unexpected and undetermined conditions once they have had enough opportunities for well-informed decision-making (Miller & McAteer,

1971). As the function of the government has grown more complex, many citizens apparently have become apathetic to social concerns and ineffective in dealing with community, state, and national problems. Such apathy is evidenced by the small percentage of eligible voters who actually vote in local as well as state and national elections. This further indicates the need for citizenship training.

It has been suggested that schools and/or society have not provided young people with proper tools for participating effectively in this changing society (Bernstein, 1971; Browne, 1973; Jaworski, 1975; Taylor, 1974). Browne (1973) appeared to indict teachers for failing to realize that students could learn skills directly related to their role as citizens. Jaworski (1975), however, was less accusing of teachers and pointed out that society has

> failed to impress upon the very young how the law functions to protect individual rights--how it provides for orderly, democratic change; what the difference is between dissent and violent protest; why individual rights must be balanced with individual responsibility to the total society. (1975, p. 54)

One effective tool in assisting students to become active participants in society was suggested by Taylor (1974). He felt that the student's real self must be actualized, that the student's

identity must be clarified, and that the student's self-acceptance must be maintained or enhanced. He added:

> In order to achieve a sincere involvement in one's society, the student must find and know his intimate self. In the process of getting to know himself better and of becoming a more knowledgeable and responsible person, the student must confront the current problems of both an individual and social nature. (p.447)

When students move toward self-actualization, as Taylor suggests, concern over "protecting" them from controversial issues or harsh realities should be decreased. Bernstein (1971) pointed out the danger of teachers' trying to "protect" students and of their avoiding the discussion of controversial issues in their classrooms. He maintained:

> Hesitation to make critical study of . . . strongly felt issues a part of the high-school curriculum undoubtedly stems in part from desire to "protect" youngsters against the trauma and insecurity that currently afflict their elders. But to run schools on a business-as-usual basis with no attention to these issues may result in the young adapting to such matters as war, assassination, and injustice as the normal run of things instead of viewing them as the aberrant and undesirable human acts they are. (p. 458)

Need for Expanded and Improved Curriculum

Literature suggests a need for an expanded and improved curriculum in citizenship education (Adult Functional Competency: A Summary, 1975; Bernstein, 1971; Cain, 1972; Cornbleth, 1971; Jaworski, 1975; Schofer, 1973; Shaver, 1967; Taylor, 1975). These appeals for an enlarged curriculum come from several disciplines in the social sciences and were suggested for a variety of reasons: (a) the disregard for justice among high governmental officials, (b) the lowering of the voting age, (c) the irrelevance of many current curricula to student lives, (d) the increasingly mobile society, and (e) the need for a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

To prepare young people for participating intelligently in the democratic processes, "we must obtain in our schools, beginning as early as the elementary grades, a revitalized curriculum of education in the real meaning of citizenship" (Jaworski, 1975, p. 54). The effective curriculum would emphasize understandings, not facts, and discussion of vital issues and problems rather than an evasion of them (Bernstein, 1971). It could be based largely upon the premises of historical documents of American freedom and liberty, namely, the United States Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and historical court decisions (Cain, 1972). Elective courses on a variety of current issues could be offered (Bernstein, 1971). In order

for our laws to serve the public, citizens must be knowledgeable of the American legal and political system. Certainly, courses in citizenship education must be reality-oriented in order to have an impact on student behavior now as well as in the future.

Since secondary schools have given little attention to the implications of the lower voting age, there is a need for expanding and improving the secondary citizenship and/or social science curriculum (Cornbleth, 1971). She maintains that "the expansion of the electorate to include 18 to 20 year olds can have a beneficial impact by spurring the assessment of existing civic education programs and the implementation of curriculum revisions which might otherwise occur much more slowly or not at all" (p. 326). She adds that it is more important that students be prepared for responsible participation now as opposed to some distant point in the future when they have reached adulthood.

Another reason to expand the typical citizenship programs is "to meet the needs of our highly mobile, spatially divided society" (Schofer, 1973, p. 508). Schofer explained:

> Young people are disenfranchised by the millions because they believe that in moving or changing residence they do not belong to the new district in which they find themselves—that they have less right and responsibilities of citizenship because they are spa-

tially mobile. The predispositon to respect political boundaries above self- or group interests, to consider citizenship fixed in one place rather than in one person, is so strong and so deep that many people cannot understand the problem until their consciousness is deliberately raised. (Schofer, 1973, p. 508)

The underlying theme of Schofer's discussion appears to be consistent with that of Taylor (1974), namely, the manner in which students view themselves. Self-actualized students who are given an adequate orientation about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship could discharge their civic duties in a responsible manner.

An intensive concentration upon citizenship education is suggested by results from a study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) ("Political Knowledge & Attributes," 1974). Following are examples of the results of the 1971-72 nationwide study of young adults, ages 26 to 35:

1. Forty-four percent could correctly use an election ballot.
2. Sixty percent knew that candidates for the presidency are nominated at national conventions.
3. Fifty-six percent believed atheists should have the right to serve in public offices.
4. Nineteen percent either denied or were undecided about a newspaper's right to criticize a governmental official.

Examples of the results of the same study with 17-year-olds are as follows:

1. Less than 50 percent knew that candidates for the presidency are nominated at national conventions.
2. Sixty-three percent believed atheists should have the right to serve in public offices.
3. About 74 percent felt that citizens are obligated to report acts of vandalism they witness.

The results of another study, the Adult Performance Level Project (APLP), suggested a need for an intensive concentration in citizenship education ("Adult Functional Competency in Texas," 1975). Following are examples of the results of the study:

1. When the adults were instructed to read a section of a pamphlet regarding one's rights when arrested, a little over 40 percent indicated the portion which was most appropriate and applicable to a situation described and reported in a survey questionnaire.
2. About 85 percent determined which state had the largest number of representatives in Congress when presented with a map showing the number of persons living in imaginary states.
3. Only about 50 percent responded correctly when asked which state had the most Senators.

4. Approximately 80 percent could write a congressman asking him to vote against a bill.

The results of the APLP for government and law are summarized below:

> About 28.4 percent of the Texas adult population, or some 2,286,000 persons, function with difficulty in coping with tasks which are related to Government and Law. This percent is slightly higher than the percent of functional incompetency found for the nation as a whole.
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> . . . . . .
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> This relatively high percent of incompetency demonstrates that a large number of adults have inadequate knowledge and resources in dealing with civil or criminal matters and little understanding of the structure of government. . . . A real need for dealing with knowledge and skills in this area is demonstrated ("Adult Functional Competency in Texas," 1975, p. 36)

A needs assessment conducted by the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) during the 1974-75 school year suggested that DISD "teachers, professional personnel, and students unanimously viewed personal development in the area of citizenship as the most important goal in the social studies program" (Lym, 1975,

p. 23). Furthermore, Lym's study revealed that among nine skill areas in social studies (political science, physical geography, socio-economic geography, psychology and philosophy, economics, sociology and anthropology, history, citizenship, and appreciation of social studies), citizenship was perceived as needing most improvement. In other words, among the nine areas, the greatest discrepancy between what was being emphasized and what should be emphasized existed in the area of citizenship. Consequently, it ~~is~~ WAS concluded that citizenship education in the DISD claim ED the greatest need for improvement in social studies as far as curriculum development and implementation ~~are~~ WERE concerned. Relevant literature suggests that the same conclusion is applicable to other school districts.

Suggestions for Curriculum Development

Content persons have offered several suggestions which might be used in developing curriculum for citizenship education (Bernstein, 1971; Browne, 1973; Cain, 1972; Cornbleth, 1971; Miller & McAteer, 1971; Shaver, 1967; Taylor, 1974). These individuals as well as others, place different emphases upon course content, methods of study, and intensity of training. In spite of disagreement among specialists, perhaps most of them would agree on general suggestions for curriculum development or citizenship programs. These suggestions could result in the development of a program that would assist students in

1. Understanding and accepting themselves.
2. Adjusting to societal changes.
3. Realizing that others share similar experiences, anxieties, and emotions.
4. Recognizing the importance of obeying rules, signs, and laws.
5. Translating civic knowledge into citizenship behaviors.
6. Developing analytic and inquiry skills.
7. Overcoming passivity.
8. Developing attitudes which are conducive to creative group participation through laboratory experiences.
9. Participating in the decision-making processes of society.

This program should take on an action-centered approach to citizenship education as stressed by Browne (1973) and Vincent (quoted in Cain, 1972), and alluded to by Taylor (1974). Vincent maintained:

> A program in citizenship education, that is as good as we know how to make it, will not get by without some laboratory experiences in citizenship. Whatever else there may be and however good the program is in other respects, there must be an opportunity for students to

practice good citizenship. (Quoted in Cain, 1972, p. 221)

Similarily, Browne asserted:

> The stress is upon personal interaction rather than upon a civics curriculum. Therefore, the teacher will also have to work outside the structure of social science courses to maximize the school's potential to develop good citizens. Participatory programs should be set up that have desired goals in mind that can be measurably observed. (1973, p. 150)

If citizenship education is to affect changes in student behaviors, a program must be provided that will involve them in realistic situations and problems. The laboratory or action-centered approach must have a distinctive place in the curriculum at all grade levels. Its position must be clear and directive; passive lip-service by school personnel will not affect student behaviors. A discussion of life-related issues and problems must be adhered to. Merely teaching citizenship concepts will have little, if any, effect upon the actions of students. The approach to citizenship development must meet rigorous standards set forth by behavioral objectives which can be measured. These behaviors and habits must be reinforced in the schools in order for them to be exhibited and continued after graduation. Taylor (1974) suggests that new citizenship

programs must be reality-oriented in the following ways:

1. We must advance the student toward affective goals as well as cognitive objectives.
2. We must reshape the school environment into one where the total development of the student is fostered.
3. We must use learning environments outside the formal schoolroom.
4. We must use political and social systems of the school as a model for study.
5. We must provide the student with the opportunities and tools for thinking reflectively about his/her beliefs.
6. We must provide the student with experiences in dealing with conflict.
7. We need a teaching situation in which the teacher can be self-actualizing. (1974, pp. 448-449)

These suggestions can be implemented in an action-oriented classroom or laboratory where students are exposed to current issues and problems and where emphasis can be placed on analytic and rational thinking. With the laboratory approach, course content becomes relevant and knowledge becomes an effective tool for participating effectively in society. Educators, jurists, lawmakers, and politicians must pool their expertise, their insights

and their resources in order to design, develop, and implement such a practical and realistic approach to citizenship training.

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